

Research Companion to the Periphery and Peripheral Regions. Concepts, Diagnosis, Dilemmas
Jerzy Bański (ed.)

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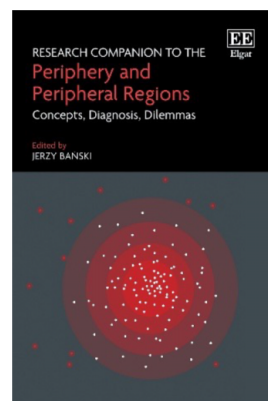
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Peripheries are no longer a comfortable analytical category. For decades, the term was commonly used to describe territories occupying subordinate positions in relation to relatively well-defined centres, typically characterised by lower levels of accessibility, population density, economic capacity or political influence. Yet the intensification of territorial interdependencies, the overlapping of decision-making scales and the growing integration of economic, technological and institutional networks have profoundly complicated this understanding. Accessibility remains a key dimension for interpreting centre–periphery relations, but it can no longer be understood solely in terms of physical proximity. Rather, it also refers to the capacity to access resources, services, information, innovation and spaces of decision-making. Within this context, peripherality may be found in depopulating rural areas, intermediate regions losing centrality, progressively

1• The eBook version is priced from £20/\$26 from eBook vendors while in print the book can be ordered from the Edward Elgar Publishing website: <https://www.e-elgar.com>

marginalised metropolitan spaces, remote communities, extractive territories, or even neighbourhoods physically embedded within global cities yet disconnected from their main opportunities. This diversity provides the starting point for Jerzy Bański's edited volume, which approaches peripherality through three complementary lenses: concepts, diagnoses and the dilemmas of place-based public policies.

The volume is organised into three parts. The first, devoted to concepts and research approaches, is particularly valuable because it avoids reducing peripherality to a purely geometric condition. The opening chapters distinguish between marginality, margins, peripheralisation and "left-behind places", demonstrating that a territory's subordinate position cannot be explained solely by distance, but also by relationships of dependency, institutional invisibility, social disconnection and the erosion of its capacity to shape its own future.

Particularly significant is the emphasis placed on understanding peripherality as a process rather than a condition. Moving the discussion from periphery to peripheralisation allows the authors to examine how territories progressively lose functions, population, institutional capacity, economic centrality or political recognition. It also makes it possible to read together phenomena that would otherwise remain disconnected, ranging from remote Canadian communities to peripheral regional innovation systems in Argentina, where the notion of the "periphery of the periphery" introduces a compelling multiscalar perspective.

Without proposing a single overarching theory, the volume nevertheless reveals important resonances between seemingly unrelated processes. References to centre-periphery theory, world-systems analysis and Latin American structuralism do not provide a comprehensive explanatory framework, but they do help situate peripheralisation within an increasingly interconnected global economy, where some territories concentrate decision-making, innovation and capital accumulation while others become specialised in the provision of resources, labour, inexpensive land, energy, leisure or the absorption of environmental externalities. This perspective is particularly valuable because it avoids treating each case as a local anomaly, instead relating them to broader patterns of contemporary capitalism and the production and consumption models through which it operates.

The second part, devoted to diagnosis, tests this conceptual framework through a remarkably diverse set of case studies. Hungary illustrates how changes in the scale of analysis alter interpretations of territorial inequality, as apparent convergence at aggre-

gate levels may conceal widening local disparities. Palestine offers a historical-territorial reading of peripherality through nomadism, agriculture and land ownership. Australia highlights the vulnerability of peripheral economies dependent on agriculture, mining and tourism. Castilla-La Mancha explicitly connects the discussion to the Spanish debate on rural depopulation. Maputo shifts the focus towards African urban peripheries, while Poland introduces the electoral dimension of spatial inequality and the geography of political discontent. The chapters devoted to rural imaginaries and regional resilience complete a section in which peripherality emerges as an economic, demographic, political, cultural and symbolic reality.

This section reinforces one of the book's central contributions: the periphery is not a particular type of place but a shifting position within unequal territorial systems. It may manifest itself through depopulation, economic dependency, urban vulnerability, symbolic decline, political subordination or deficits in functional integration. This perspective is particularly relevant for Spain, where peripheralisation takes highly diverse forms, including vulnerable neighbourhoods within major metropolitan areas, inland territories experiencing prolonged demographic decline, small and medium-sized towns losing their role within the urban system, or regions that are progressively excluded from circuits of innovation, skilled employment and institutional decision-making.

The third part, devoted to the dilemmas of development, planning and governance, is perhaps the most stimulating from an applied perspective. The contributions demonstrate that policies targeting peripheral territories fail not only because of insufficient resources but also because of inappropriate scales of intervention, institutional fragmentation, the uncritical transfer of policy models, weak local capacities and the subordination of territorial cohesion to competitiveness. The chapter on smart shrinkage in Finland raises a question that is as uncomfortable as it is necessary: some territories may need to be planned not through the expectation of renewed growth but through the guarantee of quality of life, services and rights for smaller populations.

The chapters devoted to Italy, Hungary, Denmark and Finland all converge on a common point: territorial policies require appropriate governance scales. Peripheries cannot be effectively governed if municipalities are confused with functional territories, if policy programmes proliferate without an integrated strategy, if participation is expected from communities with limited institutional capacity, or if funding is allocated without taking territorial needs into account. These reflections resonate strongly with recent debates in Spain, including the "30-Minute Country" initiative and the growing

emphasis on functional territories as the appropriate scale for guaranteeing access to essential services.

Equally noteworthy is the incorporation of environmental justice into the discussion. The chapter on waste management in Quebec illustrates how peripheral territories may function as spaces for receiving environmental externalities. This perspective broadens current debates on Spain's ecological transition, where many inland territories face not only demographic decline and the loss of services but also increasing pressure to host energy, extractive and logistical infrastructures that sustain predominantly metropolitan patterns of production and consumption.

The volume's principal achievement lies in preserving the analytical usefulness of the concept of periphery without reducing the extraordinary empirical diversity of the processes it encompasses. Its breadth is also its principal limitation. The variety of cases, scales and methodological approaches inevitably makes it difficult to construct a unified theory of peripheralisation. Yet this may also be one of its most important lessons: there is no single periphery, but rather multiple processes of peripheralisation that can only be understood through a relational, socio-historical and multiscale perspective.

For Spanish readers, the volume is particularly relevant because it encourages the joint consideration of phenomena that are often analysed separately: depopulation, urban vulnerability, the declining centrality of medium-sized cities, the weakening of many inland territories, functional dependency, growing metropolitan inequalities and the crisis of territorial governance. At a time when Spain is updating its diagnosis of vulnerable urban neighbourhoods while advancing towards new functional delimitations for addressing demographic challenges in rural areas and *peripheral* regions, Bański's volume offers a timely reminder that peripheralisation cannot be addressed simply through economic growth, improved connectivity or increased funding. Rather, it requires a more precise understanding of the relationships that produce peripheral conditions and the scales at which they can be effectively governed.

Perhaps one of the book's greatest strengths is that it invites readers to move beyond traditional dichotomies –centre/periphery, urban/rural– and instead approach territorial processes through a relational and multiscale perspective. For this reason, *Research Companion to the Periphery and Peripheral Regions* is an ambitious volume, inevitably uneven in the diversity of its contributions, yet highly valuable for the breadth of debates it opens. Its principal contribution lies less in providing a definitive definition of the periphery than in shifting attention away from the mere description of territories

towards the relationships that shape their positions of centrality and subordination. From this perspective, the periphery ceases to be understood as a simple geographical condition and instead becomes a relational category, a socio-historical process and a political dilemma through which the territorial fractures of the contemporary world can be interpreted from an inherently multiscalar perspective.